Blaxhall Village Newsletter

Winter 2026

A Wolf for Winter …

We've so far been fortunate enough to avoid any serious winter weather this year, but Evelyn Parkinson managed to snap this lovely shot of January's wolf moon above a sprinkling of snow last month. January's full moon is often known as the Wolf Moon in the Northern Hemisphere because it marks the time of year when it was believed that wolves howled more, as there was less food around.

It's a long time since a wolf was seen in Blaxhall, indeed the last wolves in England were believed to have been killed around 1500, though they clung on in Scotland for another 180 years.

We can't go back that far, but we have got some new photos on the History page from around the turn of the 20th century. We also have a big update from the church, as some 12 months' of repairs draw to a close. Some of those

will have been the biggest and most visible since the tower collapsed around 300 years ago.

All being well the church will be opening again in the spring, in time for the 2026 Blaxhall Festival.

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End in Sight for Tower Repairs

The latest update is that the scaffolding is being struck externally to allow the new louvres to be installed. These will be wild-life friendly louvres with integral swift nesting boxes on the North and East faces and 2 bat access points. The scaffolding is also beginning to come down internally to the level of the silence chamber floor once the tie rods have been signed off. We've listed some of the completed repairs below, and added some photos on page 9.

Tie Rods
The hole through the south end of the east wall has been adjusted/realigned to the south, by excavating flintwork about 150mm to the south for the full thickness of the wall, to accommodate the new southern tie rod at silence chamber level.

Staircase Tie Plate
The tie rod has been passed through the I .0m long tie plate at 400mm from the west end while clearing the vertical cables by about 50mm. Profiles have been taken so that the plate and ribs have been fabricated to suit the curve with minimal mortar packing.

Walltop Brickwork
A brick has been inserted on edge to the north side of the east end of the north belfry floor beam to close the wall top and has thus secured the beam end.

Previous Crack Repairs
The old pointing to the vertical crack at the north end of the west wall at silence chamber level had a crack to the south side extending to 2.5m below the underside of the belfry floor and this has been rectified.

Drilling Rig
The locating pins for the drilling rig have been removed from the external walls of the tower and made good, and the damaged mortar has been repointed. The packing has been made tight behind the historic tie plates. The top edge has been flaunched to shed water.

Loose Brick
Loose bricks have been re-bedded towards the south end of west wall at silence chamber level.

North Crack
The internal north silence chamber crack has been repaired but to a greater depth and width than specified.

Buttress Straps
Check and ensure that packing behind the two straps to the southwest buttress is full and tight particularly on the underside.

Parish Council

Our roads and ditches have been well tested over the last few weeks and we have seen a big improvement on the last few years. Most run offs and ditches are working well but we still struggle with the village's 500 grips (the small cut outs on the road verges that run into open land or ditches). In the past D E Keebles have kept these clear, but we now have a problem. The specification for the machinery permitted to carry out the works changed about 4 years ago and the County Council have not visited Keebles to give approval to the new piece of machinery that Keebles have manufactured. This means Keebles are not allowed to work on the grips until the County Council deigns to give their approval. Consequently these runs are clogging up, we continue to chivy up the council but yet again we have to watch this space until they act.

Congratulations to BCOST for another excellent event with the annual Wassailing. A super bonfire, lots of saucepan banging and lovely mulled cider and nibbles. We look forward to bumper fruit harvest!

Village Hall

The Christmas party was a great success as usual. Local band Six Pack were very well received and a great evening was had by all. Proceeds as always goes to keeping our village hall in tip top condition.

The games afternoons on the last Sunday of each month continue until the end of March and provide good fun and a chance for the village to get together. So why not come and join us 2.30 Sunday 22nd February.

It's been a busy and lively start to the year at The Blaxhall Ship, with packed events, fantastic food, and plenty of reasons to visit over the coming weeks.

Burns Night Celebrations

A big thank you to everyone who joined us for our Burns Night Supper on Saturday, 24th January. It was a wonderful evening celebrating the life and poetry of Robert Burns, with great food, warm company and a brilliant atmosphere throughout. We really appreciate the continued support from our local community and loved seeing so many familiar faces enjoying the night with us.

Live Music in January & February

Our live music events have brought a great buzz to the pub over January and into February. From relaxed Sunday sessions to lively evening performances, it's been fantastic to see people gathering to enjoy local talent in such a friendly setting. Highlights include our Sunday live music afternoons, such as David Williams' performance, which provided the perfect soundtrack to a busy Sunday service. We'll continue to host regular live music, folk afternoons and special events, so keep an look out for upcoming dates.

Quiz Nights Going Strong

Our quiz nights continue to grow in popularity and are proving to be a real hit. To make everyone more comfortable, we now host the quiz across both the restaurant and bar areas. Teams of 4–6 are welcome, with a small entry fee that goes straight into the winner's prize pot. We also offer a pre-quiz meal deal for those who want to make a full evening of it. The atmosphere has been fantastic, with friendly competition, lots of laughs and some very creative team names!

Gourmet Night – A Special Evening

We're excited to be hosting a Gourmet Night this February, offering a refined four-course dining experience designed to be enjoyed at a relaxed pace. It's a step up from our usual pub favourites and a great excuse to dress up and enjoy an indulgent evening out. Tables of four will receive a complimentary bottle of wine, and booking is essential due to limited spaces.
Saturday 14th February – 7 pm

We look forward to welcoming both familiar faces and new visitors to The Blaxhall Ship Inn soon.

We received a contact via the Blaxhall website last month, from a chap called Paul Woods, who used to visit Blaxhall as a boy, to stay with relatives. As well as fond memories, he sent us the photos on the right, and below.

He has limited information about the image on the right, but believes it to be his great-grandmother, Susannah French (nee Knights), with her parents, Robert and Mary Ann. He has no details of the location, but I'm pretty certain it's the last house on Stone Common as you head towards the Rectory. This would also tie in with where the census suggests the family were living at the time. The date is also unknown, but it's clearly quite early. It has to be before Mary Ann's death in 1907, and possibly prior to Susanna's marriage in 1888.

We'd love to hear from anyone who can confirm the identity of the trio, so please contact shane@blaxhall.com if you can help.

Meanwhile, it looks as though Robert was enjoying a "churchwarden" pipe, this was the name given to a style of pipe with very long stem, be they made of briar wood or clay.

The second photo, from around 1916, is Susannah French again, with her daughters, Maud and Florence. Sadly, Maud died just 3 years later, aged only 18, but Florence (aka Putt) lived on in the village, never marrying, eventually passing away in 1984.

Susanna's older brother, Harry James, was the father of much loved village icon Kenny "The Sheriff" French. Having arrived in Blaxhall in the mid 1800s, we can trace the French family back another 100 years, to Easton with reasonable certainty, but beyond that the trail goes cold.

Our next photo was recently shared by the Wickham Market Archive Centre, and shows Ship Cottages around the very early 1900s. Sadly, we don't know the identity of any of the children featured in the shot, and there's not too much chance of guessing, given that there were around 80 in the village at the time!

In the centre, we can just see the shop, which we featured earlier last year. Curiously, there appears to be a large postbox outside the shop, even though the post office (today's *Old Post Office*) had been operating for at least 20 years by then, just 30 seconds walk away. The Ship, annoyingly hidden by a tree, looks much the same as ever from what little we can see. The nearest house, on the other hand, has apparently been treated to a recent new roof, and its brickwork is noticeably fresher than its neighbour. Given that it was added to the end of the row at some point you can't help wondering if we're seeing original "newness", but the chimney and end wall both look too weathered to support the idea. Perhaps if someone has an accurate build date they could let us know?

The road has evidently not yet been metalled, which must have been interesting in winter, but there were considerably more ditches around fields back then, and less vulnerable field entrances, so perhaps a lot less water reached the roads in the first place.

That isn't to say there weren't problems if the rain was severe enough. In August 1872 a downpour occurred that was described as the most severe in many years, which was reported to have so completely washed away the topsoil from fields around Blaxhall Hall that they were left entirely devoid of soil and covered in sand, "just like the beach". Some of that topsoil found its way onto the railway line, just as the noon train from Saxmundham was passing, resulting in the train being be derailed and engine overturned. Remarkably, despite several injuries, nobody was killed. On the road from Little Glemham, meanwhile, the water cut gullies and holes "several feet deep", so overall the day would have provided some pretty good pics for a 19th century Blaxhall Facebook page!

Blaxhall Bicycle Club

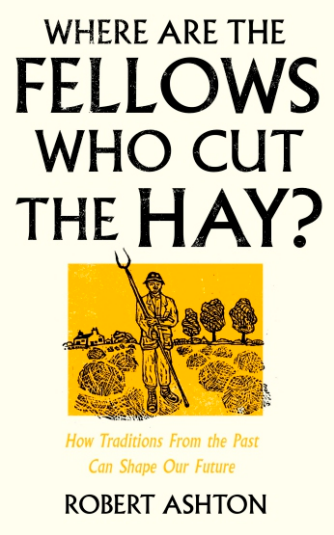
New Members are always welcome. If anyone would like to join the WhatsApp group, please message David on 07876568135

As the days become longer and the skies become brighter, it's time to dust down your cycles in readiness for some BBC fun rides.

The rides generally take place on Saturday or Sunday mornings and are advertised on the BBC WhatsApp group. They begin at Blaxhall Village Hall and typical destinations include Orford, Woodbridge and Sizewell, although it is always open to cyclists to join or leave the ride en-route. Rides are open to all and are essentially a social event, which inevitably involves a coffee shop stop.

For the more adventurous, The Boxford Tornado Cycle Sportive takes place on Sunday 26th April, over a distance of 32 or 64 miles and the Dunwich Dynamo takes place overnight on 25th and 26th July, over a distance of 114 miles

More from The Fellows who Cut the Hay



Robert Ashton has sent us the following news of an upcoming paperback launch on and film show on Sunday 29 March.

Many in the village will remember the launch of my book *Where are the Fellows who Cut the Hay* in Blaxhall Village Hall in 2024, when we showed the films A Writer's Suffolk and Here's a Health to the Barley Mow and Rev Rob Leveritt interviewed me about the book.

The book sold well in hardback and was longlisted for a Wainwright Prize in 2024 and shortlisted for Suffolk's New Angle Prize in 2025. Sadly the publisher went bust, but I now have a new publisher Wilton Square Books and a paperback edition will be published on 19th March.

To launch the paperback I will once again be showing those two films, this time at the Castle Community Rooms in Framlingham, at 2pm on Sunday 29th March. The event will also be a fundraiser for Framlingham charity Hour Community and tickets cost just £5.00 per person.

I'm hoping to get as many people who remember George Ewart Evans along on the day, as well of course as anyone who would love to see those two wonderful films.

Tickets:
https://www.tickettailor.com/events/leistonbookfestivalcic/2040462

Robert Ashton

Cross-exasmining the Crossing I was Cross About

Readers of the last Newsletter may remember that I touched on the subject of the road and railway crossing at Blackstock, and its current status. I've received several emails since then, in answer to my enquiries, but sadly we're not much clearer. Suffolk County Council believe it's still open to all traffic, as do Ordnance Survey, but Network Rail eventually concluded it was closed to cars, although they couldn't decide *when* it was closed; possibly 1970, possibly 2015, or possibly an unknown later date. Clear as mud, then.

BCOST News

We are delighted that BCOST's application to East Suffolk Council's Enabling Communities fund has resulted in a generous grant of £750 towards the cost of a set of hurdles to be kept at Stone Common. This will be of great help for enclosing, and moving around, the sheep which are used for conservation grazing on the public access land there - when they are not busy grazing the churchyard. Our thanks go to our local councillor, Tim Wilson, for his support of our application.

On Sunday 25 January, BCOST held a 'Wassail' to toast and celebrate the fruit trees the village has planted over recent years in our public spaces. The custom of apple wassailing (also known as 'field-visiting' or 'apple howling') goes back as far as Pagan times, with ceremonies which sought to encourage the first stirrings of life in the land as it emerged from winter, thus ensuring that the next season's crop would be plentiful. The practice was still common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially in apple-growing areas in southern England. It involved visiting the local orchards in mid-January and 'wassailing' the trees by pouring cider on the roots, and laying cider-soaked bread or toast among the branches. Songs would be sung or rhymes chanted to the fruit trees, and pots and pans banged, to encourage a good crop.

Our own version of the ceremony began at the playing field, where we poured cider and recited traditional verses to the trees before processing (with much banging of pans and shouting of 'wassail') to Stone Common to do the same at the fruit trees there. As afternoon turned to evening, we lit a bonfire at Stone Common and shared mulled cider, hot dogs and apple cake.

BLAXHALL PRODUCE SHOW 2026

With all the rain we've had recently it is hard to imagine the sun shining on the Blaxhall Fete, but let's hope for a beautiful day in August. Meanwhile, please think about your possible entries for the Show when planning this year's planting in your garden or allotment as we will be hoping for another bumper display of your magnificent vegetables, flowers, herbs and fruit.

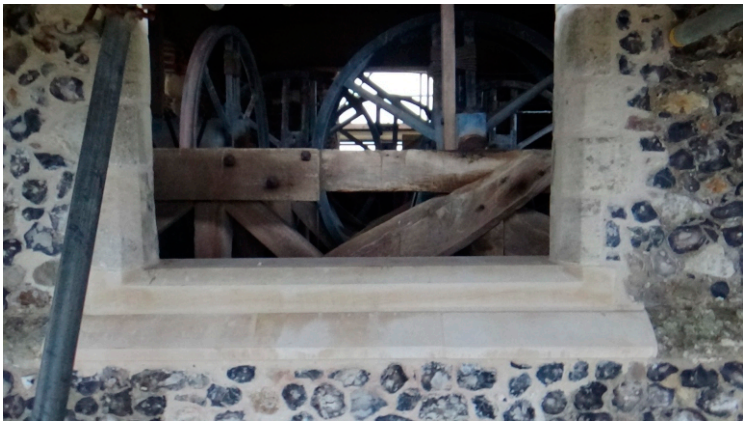
We will also repeat our sale of any spare produce or gardening-related items so would welcome any contributions. (We had several requests for marmalade last year to it would be lovely if you're making some now and could put a pot aside for us.)

If you have any questions please contact me on 07769 830676 or email hallfarmhoo@hotmail.com

Games Afternoon at The Village Hall

Join us for the last two Games Afternoons of the season!
Sunday 22nd February & Sunday 29th March, 2:30–4:30pm
Come along for a few hours of fun. Whether you're up for board games, fancy tackling our community jigsaw, or feeling energetic enough for table tennis—there's something for everyone. Bring your favourite game if you'd like, or simply pop in for a cuppa and a chat with neighbours.
We'll have tea, coffee, soft drinks and snacks available throughout the afternoon.
No obligation to contribute, but there'll be a donation bowl for anyone who'd like to help with hall rental and heating costs.
Everyone's welcome—we'd love to see you there!
Sylvy & Pom

Church Repairs



Parish Councillors

Graham Bowles	01728 688192 (Chairman)	Karen Baker	01728 688200
Shane Pictor	01728 885215	Ray Herring	01728 746337
Jonathan Cutting	01728 885115	Mark Oakley	01728 687507
Graham Atkinson	01728 687589	Maria Cooke	
Joanne Peters	01394 459400 (Parish Clerk)		

Suffolk Coastal District Councillor - Tim Wilson 07823 587947 tim.wilson@eastsuffolk.gov.uk
Suffolk County Councillor - Andrew Reid 07545 423799 andrew.reid@suffolk.gov.uk
Copies of minutes and agendas can be found at http://blaxhall.onesuffolk.net/parish-council/

Parish Council meetings are held in the Village Hall at 7.30 and are open to all parishioners, the public and press. The 2026 dates are: **Wednesday 7th January, Wednesday 5th March, Wednesday 7th May, Wednesday 2nd July, Wednesday 3rd September** and **Wednesday 5th November.**

Community Transport – "Connecting Communities" **01728 635938**. The service booking line operates 08.45am to 4pm, Mon-Fri. You can also book a pick-up with "Katch" bus service by using the app, or by phoning **01728 635939**.

Blaxhall Commons & Open Spaces Charitable Trust – www.blaxhallcommonstrust.org
For contact details of all trustees ring Mark Oakley **01728 687507**

The **Mobile Library** has stopped visiting Blaxhall as of January 2025, but currently still stops at Tunstall. For details of where/when use the website or phone number below.

Large print, Audio & Childrens' books, also CDs and DVDs are available for a small charge.
Contact Pete Wells or Helen Hudson via help@suffolklibraries.co.uk, or visit the website **http://suffolkreads.onesuffolk.net/libraries-and-mobiles/**or phone **01473 584563**

To put something in the Village Noticeboard, please ring Graham Bowles 01728 688192
To put something in the Newsletter email to shane@blaxhall.com tel. 01728 885215

Allotment information contact Sophie Martin on 07724 356916, Blaxhall.Allotments@gmail.com

Tree Warden - Joy Shaw, joyjoyshaw@gmail.com, 01728 688309

Previous editions of the newsletter can be found online at **archive.org/details/@blaxhall24** or visit **archive.org** and search **"blaxhall newsletter"**

Newsletter Contact shane@blaxhall.com

Deadline for next Newsletter - 10th May